

MENTORING FACULTY FOR SUCCESS: RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON EVALUATIONS OF A PROGRAM

Two related problems have long persisted on American college and university campuses. The first directly confronts individual faculty members as they pursue promotion, tenure, appointments of various kinds, increasing salary, and professional recognition. Most faculty of all ranks, but particularly junior faculty, can benefit from some guidance, support, knowledge, and opportunities provided by others as they pursue those goals. However, how and where such resources can be obtained is unclear on most campuses (Boice, 1992).

The second problem concerns the poor quality of undergraduate teaching at many academic institutions. A recent survey of public opinion on higher education found that the public places greater importance on universities' teaching and training than on their research and economic development goals (Hebel, 2003). However, faculty, particularly those at research universities, understand that publications and grants define the prestige of their university and largely determine the rewards they will receive. As a result, many are reluctant to invest much time and effort in their teaching activities, and have little commitment to the intellectual growth of their students, either inside or outside the classroom (Boyer Commission, 1998). While undergraduate education has improved in recent years, the goal of providing faculty with effective incentives for upgrading their undergraduate teaching and providing them with the skills and resources to do so remains elusive (Boyer Commission, 2001).

In response to these problems, many colleges and universities have developed various kinds of formal faculty mentoring programs (Meyers & Smith, 1999; Pierce, 1999). The purpose of this paper is to assess a mentoring program for faculty begun at Purdue University in 1997. Interest focuses on the characteristics of those who decided to become involved in the program, the nature and strength of the relationships that developed between mentoring pairs, the ways in which the participants felt that their professional performance had improved as a result of their mentoring, and participant recommendations for improving the program. Suggestions derived from the study can be incorporated into existing programs or serve as a foundation for developing new mentoring programs at community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities.

Research on Mentoring

The Benefits of Mentoring, with Some Caveats

When asked to reflect on their career successes, many if not most people point to role models who helped and/or influenced them. In academe, mentoring programs for new faculty, both formal and informal, have grown in number in recent years (Cawyer, Simonds, & Davis, 2002; Pierce, 1998). Many of those embarking on new careers have concerns about their competence, their ability to succeed, and their understanding of and ability to navigate the organizational culture in which they find themselves (Kram, 1985). They often feel isolated in their new milieu, and uncertain of exactly how to fulfill their job requirements (Olsen, 1993; Bowen, 1986). The mentoring relationship has the potential of facilitating the protégé's successful transition into his/her new role (Perna, Lerner, & Yura, 1995).

Research indicates that mentored employees tend to have greater job satisfaction, obtain promotions more quickly, and make higher salaries than those who are not mentored (Burlew, 1991; Farylo & Paludi, 1985). Mentors can fulfill both career and psychosocial functions (Kram, 1985). By virtue of their experience and position within an organization, mentors can enhance the careers of their protégés by sponsoring them, making them visible within the organization, coaching them, protecting them, and ensuring that they are given challenging assignments where they will be noticed. A study of the long-established mentoring program at Miami University of Ohio found that junior faculty participating in the program were tenured at a rate significantly higher than junior faculty who had not participated (Cox, 1997). If the relationship between mentor and protégé develops into one of mutual trust, the mentor can provide role modeling, acceptance, validation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1985, pp. 22-46).

Despite these benefits, mentoring relationships do not always produce positive results. Personality differences can doom a mentoring relationship from the outset. Failure to make the goals of the relationship clear can lead to the mentor pushing an agenda with which the protégé does not agree, leaving the protégé to feel that his/her goals have been marginalized (Johnsrud, 1990). Failure to allow sufficient time for the relationship to grow and mature can lead to disappointment and frustration. Selby (1998) suggests that mentoring programs can be time consuming and have paternalistic overtones, carrying with them the implication that new faculty members are incapable of approaching senior colleagues informally for the help they need, thereby undermining the self-confidence and self-esteem of the protégé.

Formal Faculty Mentoring Programs

It is commonly believed that "true" mentoring is an inherently informal process in which mentors and protégés come together spontaneously. Successful mentoring relationships are seen as a combination of common goals, individual personalities, and a healthy dose of luck. Hence, many organizations have been reluctant to create formal programs (Lacey, 1999).

In the case of colleges and universities, relying upon mentoring to occur on its own has often meant that most new faculty members are never mentored (Boice, 1992). Recognizing the need for the benefits of mentoring to reach a greater number of new faculty members, many universities have created such programs (Meyers & Smith, 1999; Pierce, 1998). However, The New Faculty Project, which studied new faculty hires for the National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, discovered that despite the attention paid to mentoring programs, the proportion of new faculty who have mentors has remained unchanged for the past ten years. Of those who do have mentors, most are assigned pairings within their departments. Very few mentoring programs exist across departmental lines (Menges & Associates, 1999).

In the most common type of mentoring program, departmental mentors are assigned to incoming faculty with a view toward assisting them in all phases of their careers: teaching, research, and service (Borisoff, 1998). Cawyer et al. (2002) conducted an instrumental case study of a new faculty member who was assigned a mentor by her department chair. The relationship between mentor and protégé was analyzed along five dimensions: interpersonal bonding, social support, professional advice, acculturation to the University, and accessibility. The authors concluded that, among these, the key variable in the success or failure of the mentoring relationship is the mentor's accessibility.

Boyle and Boice (1998) described a formal mentoring program for new faculty at a public university. The goals of the program were helping new faculty balance teaching with other time-consuming professional demands. Twenty-five pairs, matched across departments, completed the year-long program. The study found a high level of participation. Factors identified for the low rate of absenteeism: telephone calls to the participants, bonding, and group-meetings.

A program with goals similar to those of the Purdue program, discussed below, was created at Montclair State University in 1994-95 (Pierce, 1998). Mentors were selected from the five schools within the University by excellence of teaching, good interpersonal skills, and willingness to give time to their protégés. Individual meetings were combined with weekly, two-hour

group sessions. Mentors had multiple protégés, but were expected to form individual relationships with each one. The program was assessed each year and changes made based on the findings. Mentors discussed effective teaching practices with their protégés, helped demystify institutional roles and expectations, offered insights into the tenure process, and provided socio-emotional support. Mentors benefited from their participation by revitalizing their own interest in teaching and establishing connections with colleagues outside of their own departments. The mentoring program also contributed to the university itself by promoting communication across departmental and school boundaries, and by revealing previously unrecognized concerns of both junior and senior faculty.

This Montclair State program is based on a “networking mentoring” model. Rather than involving hierarchical, dyadic relationships, which define traditional or “grooming mentoring,” “networking mentoring” is non-hierarchical and generally involves more than two participants. This type of mentoring is egalitarian, with mentors and protégés exchanging roles as the situation requires. Implicit in this model are the expectations that each person will contribute something to the network (Haring, 1999; Swaboda & Millar, 1986). As will be seen below, that approach stands in sharp contrast to Purdue’s Faculty Mentoring Network program, which relies on the dyadic interactions of mentor and protégé(s).

The Faculty Mentoring Network at Purdue University

In 1997, Purdue University began planning for the creation of the Faculty Mentoring Network (FMN) to pursue four goals: (a) help interested faculty to become better teachers by fostering educational creativity, innovation, and effectiveness both in and outside of the classroom; (b) help faculty to cope with the demands of research and service; (c) help faculty to work toward promotion and tenure; (d) serve as an advocate for faculty members. The FMN was to complement the existing departmental and school-based mentoring programs at Purdue. Protégés would obtain mentors from outside their departments so that they could develop under the tutelage of faculty who would not be on their promotion and tenure committees, thus reducing the likelihood that politics would enter into the relationship. This would also bring a richness of diversity to the relationship.

The first class of mentors was solicited from Purdue’s Teaching Academy Fellows. These are faculty members who were recipients of the University’s highest teaching award, were nominated by their deans on the basis of outstanding teaching, and/or who had been appointed Distinguished Professors on the basis of their teaching. The faculty members who were

invited to become protégés included not only assistant professors new to the professorate, but also those who had come to Purdue with some previous teaching experience.

The first official callout for the current FMN was held in October 1999; it yielded 18 mentors. The program consisted of an introduction, presentations on mentoring, and an opportunity for junior faculty to meet with potential mentors in an informal setting. After meeting with the potential mentors, protégés could indicate a particular mentor(s) with whom they would like to work, but the choice was not guaranteed. The FMN committee made the final decision on the mentoring pairs, in order to ensure that the interests of the protégé were matched with the expertise of the mentor. Once the pairs were selected, a letter was sent to each mentor and protégé encouraging them to establish monthly meetings. Nine mentoring pairs were established in the first year.

In April, 2000, which marked the end of the inaugural program, mentors and protégés met to review whether the FMN had been worthwhile. Four mentors and seven protégés attended the session. At the meeting, a Small Group Instructional Diagnosis was conducted. The purpose was to determine what the protégés and mentors liked about the FMN, and also to elicit some suggestions for improvement. Both mentors and protégés were extremely positive about the value of the program. The protégés generally liked: (a) having a reason to talk to others about teaching, (b) getting new ideas on teaching, (c) learning about teaching in different disciplines, (d) having a safe place to get input and ask questions, and (e) feeling as though they were "not alone." Suggested areas of improvement included: (a) holding informal meetings outside of work (they felt as though they were imposing on their mentors' time), (b) scheduling a fixed monthly meeting time, (c) making contact mutual (so that protégés felt comfortable contacting mentors for meetings, and so forth), and (d) having more mentors at the callout to choose from, and (e) learning more about what might be expected from mentoring relationships.

The mentors generally liked: (a) the informal nature of the program, (b) the opportunity to help someone, (c) being paired with someone from another school, and (d) the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching. Some areas for improvement that the mentors identified included: (a) beginning the program in August, rather than November, (b) sharing the experiences of each of the mentoring pairs with the entire group, (c) publicizing the program more widely to involve more people, (d) convincing deans and department heads that mentoring is important, and (e) encouraging the pairs to continue for a second year. Following two additional years of its operation, a more formal evaluation of the FMN was conducted.

The Evaluation Study

Subjects

There were 43 faculty members in the 2001-2002 FMN program, including 25 protégés and 18 mentors. In May 2002, all members were sent an email message requesting their participation in an evaluation of the FMN. They were directed to a questionnaire on the FMN website, which they were encouraged to complete. The members were told that the results of the survey would be shared with them at the fall meeting. An email reminder was sent the following month.

Twenty-four of the 43 FMN members, 9 mentors and 15 protégés, responded to the online survey, for a response rate of 55.8%. Due to the size of the sample, the study results may be indicative of Purdue's FMN program but cannot be generalized to other such programs either on or off campus. To preserve anonymity, the results are presented so that no link can be made between mentors and protégés who worked with one another in 2001-2002.

Questionnaire Responses

Protégés responded to a questionnaire adapted from Lacey's Mentoring Program Evaluation (Lacey, 1999, p. 121). First, they were asked to report the number of times they contacted their mentor in a face-to-face meeting, by telephone, or e-mail. The results are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Frequency of Contact Between Protégé and Mentor During the 2001-2002 FMN Program

| Protégé | Face-to-face meetings | Contact via phone with mentor | Contact via e-mail with mentor | Total # of contacts |
|---------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 4 | 0 | 20 | 24 |
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| 4 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 8 |
| 5 | 8 | 0 | 15 | 23 |
| 6 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| 7 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 10 |
| 8 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 6 |
| 9 | 6 | 0 | 11 | 17 |
| 10 | 4 | 0 | 7 | 11 |
| 11 | 6 | 2 | 20 | 28 |
| 12 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 13 | 6 | 2 | 30 | 38 |
| 14 | 8 | 1 | 12 | 21 |
| 15 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Mean | 3.5 | 0.8 | 7.9 | 13.6 |

The total contact reported by protégés with mentors ranged from 3 to 38, with the mean number of total contacts being 13.6. The method used most by protégés to contact mentors was e-mail, with a mean of 7.9; the least preferred method of contact was by phone, with a mean of less than one phone call.

Protégés were asked if the FMN program lived up to their expectations and made them better teachers. They were also asked to rate the strength of the relationship they had with their mentors and whether they would continue working with their mentors beyond the 2001-2002 program. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Protégés' Perceptions of the 2001-2002 FMN Program*

| Protégé | Lived up to expectations | Made better teacher | Strength of relationship ^a | Continue after 2002 |
|---------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Yes | Yes | 8 | Yes |
| 2 | No | No | 1 | No |
| 3 | No | No | 1 | No |
| 4 | Yes | Yes | 8 | Yes |
| 5 | Yes | Yes | 8 | No |
| 6 | Yes | No | 6 | Yes |
| 7 | Yes | Yes | 5 | Yes |
| 8 | No | Yes | 5 | — |
| 9 | Yes | Yes | 10 | Yes |
| 10 | Yes | Yes | 7 | Yes |
| 11 | Yes | Yes | 8 | Yes |
| 12 | Yes | Yes | 2 | Yes |
| 13 | Yes | No | 7 | Yes |
| 14 | Yes | Yes | 10 | Yes |
| 15 | Yes | No | 5 | Yes |

^aBased on Likert Scale from 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong); Mean = 6.1

Twelve protégés indicated the program lived up to their expectations. The reasons given included remarks such as: "It felt good to have advice and support," and "I liked the informal nature of the program...the match with the expertise provided the guidance I needed." Two of the protégés, whose expectations were not met, commented "We had lunch twice... there was not a lot of relationship development that occurred," and "I felt like my mentor did a lot more talking than listening and we never really established a plan.

Ten protégés indicated they felt they were better teachers after having been through the program. Comments included: "I started to focus on weak areas." "I learned to better teach large lectures after hearing some of my mentor's experiences." "I had discussions that helped me to have a better picture of what I was doing well, not doing well, and how to improve." One protégé stated that s/he had benefited from the program, though not primarily, because of improved teaching. "While I appreciated the teaching strategies, I benefited most from working with my mentor on how to write up my

research findings. He read my papers and gave me good advice about my career. That's what I needed most."

The strength of the relationship with the mentor ranged from one to 10, with a mean of 6.1. The nine protégés who rated the strength of the relationship above the mean made remarks such as: "My mentor was very friendly and helpful." "My mentor had good advice and helped put me at ease." "He was also very encouraging and really showed his caring about my progress." On the other hand, those who rated the strength of their relationship below the mean indicated it was due to infrequent contacts, and lack of rapport and/or commitment by their mentors. They made such comments as: "My mentor e-mailed me until I met him then I felt that he did not have much interest to meet me again." "He was not as responsive as I expected." "We had different personalities such that I learned a great deal, but there was no rapport."

The mentors' appraisals of the 2001-2002 FMN program are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Mentors' Perceptions of the 2001-2002 FMN Program

| Mentor | No. of protégés | Lived up to expectations | Made better teacher | Continue after 2002 |
|--------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 1 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 2 | 1 | Yes | N/A ^a | Yes |
| 3 | 2 | Yes | No | No |
| 4 | 2 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 5 | 1 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 6 | 3 | Yes | Yes | No |
| 7 | 2 | Yes | No | Yes |
| 8 | 1 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 9 | 2 | Yes | Yes | Yes |

^a Retired

Most of the mentors had more than one protégé; one had three protégés. All nine of the mentors indicated that the FMN program lived up to their expectations. Some of their comments included: "Mentoring is critical for junior faculty... the FMN is a good way to show junior faculty how to be a strong teacher without sacrificing research." "It gave us a linkage we wouldn't otherwise have had." "We work 65 hour weeks and it does take a special effort to get folks together. Still, I believe the FMN is a very effective mechanism for

those who can take advantage of the opportunity.”

Consistent with the findings of the Montclair State study cited above (Pierce, 1998) over half of the mentors indicated that the program improved their teaching, as well as the teaching of their protégés. The reasons given included: “It made me rethink my own strategies in a large classroom setting. Ironically, I might have gotten more out of it than my partner.” “It made me think about issues I should have but didn’t think about.” “As a mentor, I have found that conversations with (protégés) really help me think more carefully about my teaching and give me new ideas based on what ‘the protégé’ is doing.” “(Conversations with my protégé) remind me of items I need to update...” All but three mentors planned to continue the relationship with their protégés after the program officially ended.

Finally, mentors and protégés were given an open-ended question seeking suggestions for improving the FMN. In qualitative inquiry, concepts should be the result of interaction between the data and the theoretical framework that guides the investigation (Lindlof, 1995; Patton, 1990). The responses to the open-ended question were examined to identify summary themes that may or may not be consistent with the mentoring literature. The themes are indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Protégé and Mentor Recommendations to Improve the Faculty Mentoring Network

| | Pair matching | Mentoring in groups | Mentoring education | Program expansion | No changes |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Number of mentors | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Number of proteges | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 |

Five common themes emerged from the feedback: pair matching, mentoring groups, mentoring education, program expansion, and no changes. In terms of “pair matching,” the mentor recommended “a more careful match between pairs that takes into consideration different schools and fields” while the protégé recommended that if a “mentor had more than one protégé, they should come from different departments.” With respect to “mentoring groups” the mentor and three protégés wanted to see group meetings, seminars, and/

or opportunities to compare notes on mentoring experiences. One mentor suggested "lunch seminars where mentors could present 15-20 minute "pearls of wisdom" topics to both mentors and protégés" while the protégés suggested "more short social meetings, more evaluation of the progress of the protégés," and "more contact with program protégés to exchange experiences." One mentor and four protégés recommended "mentoring education." For example, one thought that "each mentoring pair should be required to formulate a letter of understanding as to what the purpose of the relationship would be ... so mentor and protégé get what they want out of the relationship." Protégés recommended, "workshops for mentors to teach them how to be good mentors," or "make sure the mentor is willing to work." The theme of "program expansion" referred to getting more faculty involvement both on mentor and protégé sides of the equation. One mentor thought it would help to market the program to deans and department heads, while protégés wanted to see more "recruitment of mentors from all disciplines."

Discussion

This study sought to determine who is involved in the Purdue FMN program, the nature and strength of the relationship between mentoring pairs, whether or not those involved in the FMN program believed that their teaching was improved, and recommendations for improvement of the program.

Consistent with recommendations in the literature cited above, participation in the FMN program was voluntary. Participants in the program consisted of mentors who were more experienced faculty members and protégés who were new to the University faculty. Since the primary purpose of the FMN was to improve faculty teaching, such pairings supported the intent of the program.

The FMN committee recommended that pairs meet monthly to form a good relationship. Guidelines for creating formal mentoring programs stipulate some minimum frequency of interaction for mentors and protégés (Lacey, 1999; Pierce, 1998). Most participants were pleased with the program, stating that it lived up to their expectations. Clearly the most successful pairings were those that met frequently and found common ground on which to build a relationship. Conversely, those that failed to create such a relationship reported infrequent contacts and/or rapport.

The success of the program was demonstrated by the 10 protégés who felt their teaching was improved. Of particular interest were the five mentors who also indicated that their teaching improved. This finding is consistent with the Montclair State Program cited above whose mentors also believed their teaching improved (Peirce, 1998, p. 31). It suggests that per-

haps the program's explicit purpose could expand to incorporate the expectation that engaging in dialogue and discussing "best practice" on teaching can improve the teaching of both mentors and protégés.

Finally, participants were asked to suggest ways in which the FMN could be improved. Many were satisfied with the program and recommended it be expanded to include more faculty members. This indicated that the founding subcommittee had planned and developed an effective mentoring program at Purdue. However, many participants recommended that more thought be put into matching the mentor and protégé, and some time invested in educating them on how to have an effective mentoring relationship.

In order to increase confidence that the positive results of the study do not largely reflect the views of the particular participants, the authors utilized a second evaluation of the FMN conducted in February 2003 by its coordinator (Green, 2003). That evaluation yielded highly similar results and provides corroborating evidence that our findings and the findings of the Small Group Instructional Diagnosis were not merely methodological artifacts. Questionnaires were sent to all 47 members of the 2003 FMN. Eleven mentors and 15 protégés responded. Using a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree) the study found the protégés agreed that their interactions in the network were beneficial (mean = 4.36), that the time they invested in the program was worth it (mean = 4.36), and that they would recommend this program (mean = 4.29). The corresponding means for the mentors were 3.82, 4.09, and 4.55 (Green, 2003).

Recommendations and Conclusions

Based upon the literature and the survey responses, this evaluation study suggests that there are several courses of action that would make the FMN program, and others like it, more beneficial, particularly to the protégés:

1. Conduct an orientation session for mentors, giving clear guidelines of what is expected of them in terms of both quality and quantity of interaction. This would address the concern of several protégés that their mentors did not meet their responsibilities.
2. Broaden the criteria used to match mentor and protégé(s) to include such factors as personality and outside interests. This would address the lack of rapport that appears to have plagued a few of the mentoring pairs.
3. Encourage mentor and protégé(s) to enter into a contract of expectations, thus avoiding some potential misunderstanding about the nature and extent of the mentoring relationship. For example, some potential protégés may have greater interest in receiving

mentoring to enhance their scholarship and/or career development than to improve their teaching.

4. Add group sessions to the program, encouraging exchanges among mentors and protégés to create a network. Ongoing support for the mentoring pairs is recommended as an essential strategy for program success (Lacey, 1999; Pierce, 1998; Haring, 1993; Kram, 1985; Swaboda & Millar, 1986).

As evidenced by the Montclair State program, the likelihood of success can be enhanced by mandatory group meetings (Pierce, 1998). The Purdue FMN program would benefit from regular group meetings among mentors and protégés that would serve to encourage and support the relationships between and among mentoring pairs. With the support of the entire network, unsuccessful matches would not be as devastating, particularly to the protégés.

The benefits of mentoring are amply demonstrated by the literature cited in this evaluation study of Purdue University's Faculty Mentoring Network. Data for the study indicate that the program has satisfied the needs of most of its participants. Combining the grooming and networking models of mentoring should produce even better results as the FMN strives to assist new faculty to become better classroom teachers and researchers. With the criteria for promotion and tenure growing more stringent, mentoring can be key to faculty success.

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Planning and Changing

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Planning and Changing provides a forum for the presentation of issues and studies that inform current educational policy and practice. As such, the journal serves as a critical intellectual resource for educational leaders, practitioners, and policy makers. Peer-reviewed articles include formal research studies using quantitative and/or qualitative methodologies, as well as reflective, theoretical pieces focused on significant aspects of education and schooling relevant to the administrator, community, or the larger public good.